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# UNCLE SAM

## A Look Before and After

A

DISSERTATION

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By bequest of
William Lukens Shoemaker

# UNCLE SAM

## THE REAL AND THE IDEAL

A

DISSERTATION

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"POEMS OF EXPANSION"

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# UNCLE SAM—REAL AND LEGENDARY.

Legendary? Say, then, the ideal. For it will, of course, be objected that Uncle Sam, as a personage, is not of legendary growth, as he is not the subject of any known legend, printed fable, oral tradition or romance. So much the worse, then, for romance! But may not this be owing to the fact that we Americans have had no "Age of Fable," as we have no mythology, no material out of which the stuff of legend and of fable is woven by native story-tellers. The long twilight of the gods, in which such products are best grown and nourished, was not for us. America, or at least that portion of it called the domain of Uncle Sam, was born and launched in the full glare of modern civilization. How then could his posterity, the descendants of Uncle Sam, expect to find here anything of legendary or fabulous growth, anything like, for instance, that to be found in the British Isles, in the enchanted circle of druidic superstition, or in the "fairy rings" which, as readers know, occur so often in the pastures of Old Romance! Such things are impossible in any nook or corner of a land which is pervaded by the Society for the Diffusion of Useless Knowledge, and also loud with the strident speech of newspaperdom. Where ignorance is not allowed, legends, for the most part, do not live. But the myth-making faculty still survives among us, and it might sometime be said of a legend, as is said of that place reserved for the wicked, that if none existed, it would be necessary to invent one! Our poets and romancers must have something to work upon, if they are expected to weave not merely wonder tales for the "marveling boyhood" of men and nations, but to compose anything poetically true and consistent with the memories and traditions of our native land, that is, the ordinary stuff of poems and romances. And after all, this contention about the formal matter—if any one is disposed to contend about it—has more of an air of verbal quibbling than of essential truth. The poet makes his appeal to a certain sentiment, and the sentiment must be anchored to a fact. It may be only a fact in the realm of imagination, as Prince Talleyrand observed of love, but it must be there, and be recognized as extant and existing, call it fact, fable, legend, or what not. So, whether legendary or not, Uncle Sam is a

fact, as well as a factor in the world's civilization to-day, and to be more important hereafter. He is also a fact to be reckoned with, as poor old Spain has lately discovered to her cost, and as the European States are not slow in finding out. And though not a prophet, nor the son of a prophet, there is one thing I will venture to predict. Having gone to war for an idea, on principle, call it a philanthropic idea, or even, if you will, a quixotic one, Uncle Sam will not admit, as certain of his sponsors seem willing and disposed to do, that the war entered upon for good cause was a righteous one, and that the consequences which the war entailed upon him are necessarily unrighteous. He will never face a proposition so absurd as that. He cannot do it, neither can he nor will be back down from a responsibility which he assumed before mankind and the world, without, in the world's estimation, losing prestige which he would not regain for a hundred years. And this, not a paltry question of dollars and cents, is to us, it appears, conclusive, as a main consideration. Not commercial supremacy and an open door to the Orient, even, but, if not state necessity, the necessity of state, dignity and decorum, and, as regards Uncle Sam, a becoming sense of what is due to his own character and position, in a word, the point of honor. Can he afford to abandon his allies, and turn these islands back to Spain and anarchy, to be thrown, eventually, to the Powers in a rattle to be scrambled for, and exploited for commerce and coaling stations? Even if he were willing to forego the prize of war, and able to despise the gifts of Fortune, what would Uncle Sam gain by it? He would gain, for one thing, the character of a fool, a name to become reproach and a byword, and himself in time the laughing-stock of nations.

But Uncle Sam is no fool, nor careless of honor and reputation. He has been successful in war and courtship, mainly because he has regard for his honor and credit in the world and with foreign nations. And being prosperous, at large, he knows he cannot escape the "jettatura" of the evil eye, and the venomed tongue of slander. He has plenty of foes everywhere, but those of his own household are the meanest. To them he is indebted for a "character" which is due to their misreading of American traits, and is the result, usually, of foreign training, or of native prejudice. There is always a "squint" which betrays the writter of foreign extraction in his dealings with Uncle Sam, who is made the victim, at last, of morbid sensibilities and bad digestion, of jaundiced eyes and evil imaginations. Their

dyspeptic writing and characterizations are pathological, not psychological. This class is well represented in Mr. Kipling's poem of "The American," and in the editorial columns of a certain "British newspaper published in New York." Uncle Sam, of course, is the object of the bitter hatred and jealousy of rival powers, and these men, mostly political eunuchs and "shady" characters, attach themselves to the foreign or reactionary party in all political contests and confusions. Latterly, in their combined ante-election assaults on the administration, and on Colonel Roosevelt in New York, they went so far as to defeat their own aims, to defeat themselves.

But out of such contests come the noblest characters in time, come the best products of triumphant democracy, and to the glory of the great American People. They are good-natured, patient and long-suffering, they will stand a great deal, but they will not endure such assaults on character and motives, such contemptible flings at the conduct of an eminent and upright chief magistrate, of a gallant and successful soldier. The whole reptilian press, at home and abroad, has been engaged in this bad business for the last ten weeks—to what end or purpose? Its worst outpourings have been reproduced and echoed in foreign capitals, and given out in Paris, Berlin and Madrid, as the true expression of public opinion in the United States. We know what it all means, but they do not. They relish as much as we distaste these assaults on private character, on the honor of households, and on the riches of good name in men and women. And as we deplore the effects on national character and conduct, so we are justly indignant at this degradation of an ideal, and at all which reflects on Uncle Sam. For he is the typical American, he is a great "public character," and the hero of our national epopee—if we only had one! Indeed, we have one, not a long-winded epic, to be sure, but written in battle strophes and the building of a nation; in a great and happy family of free industrial commonwealths, a century's magnificent fruitage and performance. That is Uncle Sam his mark. Naturally, we dislike those who study to assail his character, and to sully his reputation, to belittle his achievements, to mortify and degrade him in the public eye and before the world, to caricature his person and performance, to scold and vituperate his public servants, to distort and misrepresent his aims and purposes, especially in his attitude to foreign powers, and above all, to attack him in the tenderest point, the point of honor of his country and the flag, which he represents

and upholds. To all such I commend the words—which cannot be too often recalled, nor too deeply pondered—of the greatest American of the century:

"Sir, I would forgive mistakes; I would pardon the want of information; I would pardon almost anything where I saw true patriotism and sound American feeling; but I cannot forgive the sacrifice of this feeling to mere party. I cannot concur in sending abroad a public agent who has not conceptions so large and liberal, as to feel that in the presence of foreign courts, amidst the monarchies of Europe, he is to stand up for his country, and his whole country; that no jot nor tittle of her honor is to come to harm in his hands; that he is not to suffer others to reproach either his government or his country; and far less is he himself to reproach either; that he is to have no objects in his eye but American objects, and no heart in his bosom but an American heart; and that he is to forget himself, to forget party, to forget every sinister and narrow feeling, in his proud and lofty attachment to the Republic whose commission he bears."

(Daniel Webster, as quoted in Parton's Life of Jackson, vol. 3, p. 377.)

But, of course, Uncle Sam has his faults and his foibles, though, as Franklin observed, "monstrously magnified in your microscopic newspapers." Then, he is a "character," and as such runs easily to caricature and comic exaggerations. He is the sport of "every man in his humor," and what American writer, what reporter even does not set up for a "humorist," and so have him at disadvantage? He will have his hack at him—(he would say, his whack at him). And the consequence—to Uncle Sam? He is a bundle of whims and oddities, I wish I could I say, oddities of genius, but they are for the most part the stupidest trash in the world. For instance, they make his person ridiculous. They dress him up as an antiquated beau, of the pattern of the regency—or earlier, our post-revolutionary epoch. Costumed in the Stars and Stripes, he has, always, the understrapt trowsers and spiked coat-tail, a tall white hat and a tufted chin, which with the straggled locks and hatchet face give him an "eldritch" look, and, of course, they represent him in all manner of absurd acts and attitudes, and engage him in the most quixotic enterprises. In short, an impossible character, a being of attributes which exclude one another, and hence a person acting from the most extraordinary motives and impulses. And see what absurdities, what contradictions! They make him out an owl in wisdom, and an ass in his demeanor.

He is a Jove in council, a Janus in policy, and a jack-of-all trades by vocation. He is a northern manufacturer, a southern brigadier, a western granger, populist, free-silverite, democrat or republican. He is the village oracle and statesman, the corner grocery politician, the great man at home, who dwindles as he approaches Washington. But even there he meets only his peers, and no superior, for he has no "superior" on earth! Why, he is himself a personage of the first rank and importance. He takes himself seriously, as he takes the festive cocktail in the land of his birth. Greatest country on earth, sir. He is a backwoodsman and a courtier. He comes to Congress from a western log-cabin, where he has lived all his days on corn bread and bacon, raw whiskey and tobacco. Gradually, he acquires some of the vices of civilization. He gambles a little, he swears a great deal, he plays the races, or goes to a ball-game, he "chaws" tobacco still, and expectorates, he "invites" a friend and takes his whiskey straight, but he goes to church regularly, he supports the minister and the contribution-box, is a good family man and a good citizen, upholding the laws and yet a strict partizan, and a patriot all the time. Though a democrat or a populist, he votes without a murmur, fifty millions to be placed in the hands of his most determined political opponent, to be expended in a war that is certain to win prestige for a republican administration, and almost as certain to ruin or demoralize his own party at the next election. And that is his answer to those who vilify Uncle Sam, his country and her institutions. Yes, our western friend has acquired some of the "vices of civilization," something of its polish, also, its false glitter and unrest. Contact with men and women has worn off his rough edges, has changed his appearance, sharpened his wits, improved his manners, and even altered his apparent stature and intellect. He acquires new dignities and honor, and with them new views and opinions. His manner changes, his moods vary. He is awful or affable, as he chooses. He can be stern as duty on the bench, and jovial as the genial host, the free-and-easy table companion. He can entertain the house with his oratory, and soubrettes at a wine-supper as well. He sets the table in a roar with his witty sallies. He is merry as a grig, and melancholy as a cloud in autumn.

But he is only a type. There are more of him—and he is not Uncle Sam. The latter plays many rôles in his time, and succeeds in all, or nearly all, that he undertakes. He is editor, lawyer, planter,

politician, congressman, judge, ambassador, senator or secretary of State, and president. He climbs every round in the ladder of fame, and from the top one steps off to the skies (of N. P. Willis!) in going to his final rest. Rather, I should say, that like Wolsey he has sounded the seas of glory, he has charted all the bays of suffering, has exhausted the springs of enjoyment, has tempted every phase of fortune, and tried every round of human life and experience. And with what result? The old one—all vanity and vexation of spirit. He is weary and dissatisfied. From the top of human power, which, as Dante saw, is only green for a little while, he surveys the world of toil and toilers far below, the valley and the village where he was born, the fertile glebe, and the scenes of humble life from whence he rose, and he longs for the old homestead, the church and the churchyard where his kindred rest.

> "And if my mother had not lain there,
> All my grandeur had not been."

Go to Springfield and Lake Erie, go to Fredericksburg and Mount Vernon, and muse at the graves of Garfield and Lincoln, at the tomb of Washington and his mother, if you would know the best of Uncle Sam. Virtue dwells upon the heights, but in the world the ruling powers are not too virtuous. Uncle Sam is in the world, and is not to be caught napping—by the cartoonist, or anybody. He is said to be astute and overreaching at a bargain, as in the case of the Phillipines, should he take them in, which is by no means certain.* But he may himself be taken in, should he discover, on taking, that he has caught a Tartar, or a Malay, after all! Don't be too tarnation smart, Uncle Sam. I know it is "a terrible temptation." Spain has lost, and there are the islands just going as a prize to somebody. Shall he grab them or let them go? Shall he take one or the whole boodle of them? If he don't, who will get them? Let them go to the devil, say the antis, but how? Shall they be auctioned off to Germany, Russia, or Japan, or raffled for and parted among all three? But if any rafflng is to be done, as it was I who shook the plum-tree (quoth Uncle Sam), show me, messieurs, a better claim than mine to the stake, or if that cannot be done, hold your peace forevermore. The ripeness of occasion may furnish no ground for robbing my neighbor, but still less is it a ground to you and others for robbing him, and me, too—

* Written before the conclusion of the treaty with Spain—which, by the way, is not yet confirmed.

him of his late possessions, and me of the fruits of victory. The case of Japan will not be repeated by the Powers towards us. Nor is that a case for arbitration, which the sword has already arbitrated. The guns of Dewey at Manila "bellowing victory, bellowing doom," have spoken. Now, if Germany wants the islands, let her come and take them. Russia and Japan, ditto. For our part, we may, not want the islands "for keeps," and it will be enough, for the present, to sequester them from the Powers, as a bone of contention to be fought over and snarled about. We do not want to see a general conflagaration, a European war as the consequence of our own. To put out the smouldering brand is not only a neighborly act, it may be, or may become, an international duty. The disposition of these islands as a consequence of war, is a duty devolved upon us alone, and a duty that cannot be shirked. Uncle Sam will consult nobody as to the measure of his duty and responsibility. Honor forbids. But he is not going to shut his eyes to the possibilities of the case. It is a magnificent opportunity. How magnificent, how great and far-reaching in results and consequences, perhaps no man living to-day knows. Uncle Sam does not know. But he "calculates." And here is the key to the secret of his position—I might add, of his disposition. Placed in a critical situation of extreme danger and difficulty, and exposed now to the crossfire of friend and foe alike, can he extricate himself with honor, and come unscathed from the fire of this new trial? He has met every crisis with courage, has been equal to every emergency hitherto, and why not to this? If sufficient unto the day is the evil, so is the power and the wisdom thereof. He may be, for a moment, in some trough of depression, in some valley of humiliation, but that he will rise again to the height of occasion, who can doubt? It is the way with him, he has always done so. He is accustomed to the doing of great things. He works on a large scale. No pent-up Utica contracts his powers. On the stage, the world is attracted to this unique and extraordinary personage. He is a great figure in affairs. He rather likes to dazzle and to shine, to awe and terrify and overwhelm. He is so used to doing the "impossible" that he is pleased at nothing better than the opportunity to succeed in spite of (predicted) failure, to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat, to escape from overwhelming ruin and imminent disaster. He has done it repeatedly in this war, and he will do it again. Out of this nettle, danger, he is going to pluck the flower, safety. It lies in his dispo-

sition. He is brave as Cæsar, and as cautious as Fabius. He has valor—and discretion. He is not to be caught napping. He sleeps with one eye unshut, his weather eye being always open. He is cool and determined—"keep cool"—his favorite maxim. He has, too, the advantage of position. His resources are practically unlimited, and he commands them without stint. He has opinions and a will. He has the courage of his convictions. He has ideas. His "nerve" is wonderful, and his sang-froid never deserts him. Fortune, and reputation also, are on his side. Yes, Fortune has ever "spanieled his heels," and followed him hitherto and so far on the road to greatness. Will she turn tail and desert him now? No! She is after success, she follows the great, she goes with such—personages like Cæsar—and Uncle Sam. They love dollars, but dominion more. They are covetous of honor and glory and dominion and riches, especially the riches of good name, for their country and posterity. They look for prosperity and a future bright with promise. So does Uncle Sam. He is fond of power and responsibility and big enterprises. Pacific railroads, Nicaragua canals, and all that. Strange, that this habit and this disposition of his, towards a Marriage of the Seas, and for uniting the lands and peoples of earth, should make him less philanthropic, in fact, a Timon, a misanthrope, a cannibal. He is accused (at home) of intended robbery and spoliation. He is the wolf devouring the lamb. And Spain is the lamb—poor old Spain! But Spain will survive the ordeal, and so will Uncle Sam. He was never known to be bloodthirsty. He has not the earth hunger of Greater Britain. Nor the Gallic thirst for theatricality and applause. Nor the sordid greed of the saurkrout German; nor the Russian vice of boundless extravagance and corruption; nor the low cunning of the Asiatic. These are not the vices of Uncle Sam. He has his failings and his foibles, doubtless. He has been known to "sell and mart his offices to undeservers." He has a civil service, which, for its humbuggery, is named and travestied the snivel service. The famous "blanket order" is remembered yet in Washington. He is afflicted with Bryanism, Altgeldism, Tannerism, Quayism, Plattism, Crokerism, and "boss rule," generally. Likewise, free-silverism, populism, fiatism, greenbackism, and many others. He is profuse in public moneys and expenditures. Billion Dollar Congresses are the rule, rather than the exception. True, as Speaker Reed said, this is a billion-dollar country, but no matter, it is too much. The *ne quid*

*nimis rule* is much better. And there is the everlasting unbridled license, not liberty, of the press.

Here the temptation is great, but I must not enter on a new chapter of woes, or rather a whole volume vast and voluminous of evil, of which the mere chapter headings, the bare mention alone is enough to excite the disgust, stupify the understanding, weary the patience, and stagger the credulity of readers. Let one sample of yellow journalism suffice; look at its criticisms on the conduct of the war! Must we blame Uncle Sam for all this? Let us confine ourselves to his legitimate vices. These grew mainly out of his temperament and situation. From the first he was a bundle of contradictions. He had oddities enough for a Sancho Panza. And whatever his failings or vices, he had a world to exploit them in. In his youth he was a gay deceiver. He sowed broadcast his wild oats, he left flaming trails of debauchery and ruin. In half a dozen commonwealths he planted stay-laws and harvested repudiation. He sowed bad faith with the Indian, and reaped Indian wars in consequence. He enslaved the negro, and afterward wrote his famous declaration wherein he asserted that all men are created equal. Consequence—rebellion and civil war. He was unjust in his dealings and unpunctual in his engagements to friend and foe. He was unstable in his judgments, fickle in his attachments, inconstant as a lover, and uncertain as a friend. John Bull despised him (it is not so now!) and even France, his old sweetheart, soured on him. He was wandering, restless and unhappy. He moved round with his household gods from place to place long before he married, settled down and went to housekeeping. Meanwhile, he coquetted with half a dozen maiden cities before he fixed on one—went to Washington, then a wilderness—and finally settled on the banks of the Potomac. Yes, to Washington, the Cinderella of cities, an ash-heap in summer, and a mud-hole in winter. This ward of Uncle Sam had long to wait for her Prince Charming, who found her sitting squalid and disconsolate on the cold hearthstone of her uncle, and presto! the little slip of a girl who has since played "hunt and slipper" with the Prince of Wales and Alexander of Russia, became the best groomed and most beautiful of women; ay, the poor little thing, this "huffed and cuffed and disrespectit" orphan lass of a city sprang up at once into a tall and comely maiden, the envy of all her sisters, the most charming of hostesses, the crown and glory of Uncle Sam, and the chief ornament

of his home. And the Prince Charming? Boss Shepherd was his name.

It is needless to say that Sam is now proud of his beautiful ward, and is also much attached to his niece, Miss Columbia, who, with her companion and housekeeper, constitute his immediate household, and entertain lavishly in the official world, where Uncle Sam is at home. There he lives over again the days of his youth, and sometime entertains a guest or a table companion with tales of his "salad days," and of the innumerable escapades and adventures of which he is the hero, or subject. He may gloss over some things in his past, for no man who knows the world, and particularly no great man with his wide and varied experience in life and affairs, can afford to lay bare his heart, and to look, or to let others look, too narrowly at his failings and peccadillos. Of his hair-breadth escapes in love, and war, and diplomacy, and his many "moving accidents by field and flood," his domestic treasons and foreign wars, as he himself speaks not, I pass them over here in silence. I only aim at his most salient characteristics, at his most essential traits, and I would not misread his character, which is both typical and American, if I can possibly help it. "It is my observation," said Lincoln, when complimented once for having no vices, "that men without vices are, usually, not remarkable for any virtues either." Neutral characters interest nobody. Strong traits, the individual lineaments of joy and sorrow and suffering, the "exultations and agonies" which furrow the brow and engrave their deep lines in the human countenance, proclaim the man of mixed motives, of variable humors, and altered affections, vices and virtues in strange contrast and juxtaposition. No all-round man, no character like Uncle Sam, could ever be without them. The man of "daring aims irregularly great" declares unmistakably his insular and English origin. And I note this feature also in Uncle Sam, his tendency to excess, to exaggeration. Sam was always extravagant. He spent money like water—and denied it a thousand times to his honest creditor, to the justly proud but pauper claimant, who held the documentary proofs, but had not the means to enforce payment. Again, courage is well, but recklessness? Sam can be utterly reckless—of life, honor, reputation, riches and renown. His "millions for defence, not a cent for tribute," show that, on the money side. And in numerous personal encounters he has shown himself equally reckless in his expenditure of blood and

wounds. He would throw life away as the merest bawbee. He sought the bubble reputation not only in the cannon's mouth, but on the duellist's ground, and on the deck of his gunboats. "Don't give up the ship," cried Lawrence. "I have just begun to fight," said Paul Jones, in answer to a summons to surrender, when his masts were shot away, his craft sinking, and colors riddled but still flying. In peaceful times, and in rural if rough communities, Sam has developed homicidal tendencies, often in a marked and alarming degree. He has trampled ruthlessly on the inferior races. The negro had no rights which he was bound to respect. The only good Indian was a dead Indian.

Which, in a manner, go to show that these savage traits are plainly a survival, that they are inherited from some far-off ancestor, and that in all likelihood in the far future Sam will hear "ancestral voices prophesying war"—still war. Disarmament is out of the question. For John Bull, certainly, and for Uncle Sam, probably. They have many traits and ways in common. Their pursuits are mostly commercial, their dispositions in the main, peaceful, but recent history and experience teaches that war may come at any time, and they must be prepared for it. Let us recognize the fact and not ignore it. Academical essays and orations, Charles Sumner's for instance, on "The True Grandeur of Nations," do ignore it. The consummate vanity of this man led him to overlook, as it leads others like him to overlook, and to imagine that they can set aside the facts of ethnology, and ignore the ways of Providence altogether. After ages of civilization, and after centuries of progress in learning, arts and letters, we are horrified to discover the ancient strata of these oldest and grossest of appetites and instincts, these rude barbarian vices and virilities cropping out from the forms of the conventional man, and under the veneer of social refinement and civilization. It can't be helped. It is there—to play the devil with your "culture," and to remind you—you of the Anglo-Saxon race—of the rock out of which you were hewn. And better, I say a hundred-fold better, this rude strength, and this reservoir of reserved force, these excesses than those anemic conditions of a pale and etiolated student civilization, attended as it is by nervous prostration and paresis, due to dyspepsia and insomnia, to late suppers and all sorts of dissipation, as excessive reading and study and too much Athenian culture. For these latter conditions, like the bulrushes of Nile, easily give way to the onward

sweep of tendency—to the cataract—and are blown away like chaff in the shock and whirlwind of war, while those other remain in place, like the bed-rock of the everlasting hills.

If we were to seek the place and origin of these race traits in Uncle Sam, to seek, that is, the real foundations of his power and glory in the original basaltic rock-formations of his character, and especially if we were to seek for some heroic and legendary character like him, we might have to go where we should naturally look for it, in the old Norse mythology and tales of imagination. For Sam is northern by nature and to the core of his being. In the north of Europe, and I should say to the far north, lies his ancestral home. There, the old family tree, symbolical oak or ash, curls itself softly to sleep against the northern twilight in the kirkyard of his forbears. There, in the dust, probably, of the old forgotten race of sea-kings, the bold Viking race of hardy adventure and derring-do, with their strange drinking customs and Yule-tide feasts at the sign of the Boar's Head, with servants in the hall and a great fire of logs roaring in the wide fire-place, the oaken table spread as for many guests, the assembled warrior-husbands, fathers and sons with their wives and paramours, the sirloin roast and the great horn of plenty, the much drinking and laughter and song sprinkled with jest and allusion—none too modest in their toasts and addresses—to the fair "white devils" who drank of the same cup and shared the feast with them—what if Uncle Sam were there? With that remarkable phiz and *nil admirari* manner of speech and action, and that hawk-eye of his, which the poet ascribed to Cæsar also, the grasping falcon eye which let nothing escape it, the drawling accent and intonation, the apt saying and homely proverb, the dry humor and droll audacities of speech and action; the witty fund of anecdote and invention; the story-telling habit and faculty of telling your story in the guise of a fabulist (Abraham Lincoln had it); the art, also, of concealing yourself behind words while searching with the point of a jest, or an epigram, the heart of another's intention; the sudden mirthful run of some merry conceited thought on the level ground of understanding; or the dizzy altitudinous falcon flight of some towering aerial fantasy—succeeded, next instant, by the falling drop and plunge in the stygian pool of obscurantism—the pearl-diver's groping search for the lost word, and coming up with it to the daylight surface of common things, but with the all-over dripping melancholy and metaphysic of the Hamlet

of the north; and not wanting either, if not used, the powerful divining-rod of a really great and profound spirit of imagination. That singing and sibylline quality of speech which is found in Dante alone among men of the latin race, was not unusual among the Norse folk, and in the runes and sagas of the north; in the weird of the old bards and their wizard look into futurity; in the soul satisfying wonder of the world and the universe; and, above all, in the intuitions of God and the soul, of freedom and immorality, enjoyed by no other race to anything like the same extent as by ours. But, pray, what has all this to do with Uncle Sam? Nothing whatever in his political environment, his growth and branching out among the nations; everything almost in the secret sources of his power, and his life at the roots of being. For, if all this was, or was to be in the literature of the race, it was earlier in its life, and potentially at least, in Uncle Sam. Nay, actual and extant to a degree, if one look around these States, or go around them—encompass them in the orbital sweep of the Poet of Democracy—and approaching nearer, look at the situation to-day with the eyes of a poet—like Uncle Sam. Startle not, O reader, for Sam is a great inventor, and what is poetry but invention? The poet is a maker, not necessarily of rhymes, but of roads and bridges and things, and pray, who is the great road-and-bridge builder on the continent to-day? Who is the author of its agriculture, its manufactures, and its commerce, the triple pillar of industry supporting the edifice of the commonweal, and upholding to the world a model of our free institutions? There are forty-five of these commonweals, in ranged order and resting on a triple row of pillars forming the mighty and magnificent colonnade of expansion, which greets the eye of the architect and student of our political system. The Epic of Democracy, and where in the world is its rival, or its equal? Could haughty Greece or insolent Rome show anything better? The boast of Greece was its Parthenon, of Rome its Pantheon, and we have both in yonder Capitol. We have all our penates, our household gods, enshrined beneath that stately dome surmounted by the statute of Freedom, as keeping watch and ward over them, all safely housed and folded beneath the wing of the tutelary goddess, the auspicious and benign Genius of our Country.

Does it require genius of a high order, the art and faculty of invention, judgment, memory and imagination, to construct an epic poem, and none whatever to invent a political system? Was Hamilton

less a poet than Joel Barlow, the author of "The Columbiad? Was there no music in his soul who invented those majestic rhythms contained in the balanced powers of the Constitution, and in the creation of those orchestral harmonies which establish the relation of the States to the United States, which compose our federal system? That orrery of our political heavens and earth, though not finished, was the best extant then, as now. As the Copernican system superseded the Ptolemaic, so did the American Commonwealth all previous democracies. It is the system of the one in many and of the many in one. *E pluribus unum.* And of such is Uncle Sam. He is not one character but many. He is many rolled into one. If Sam has been successful in politics and government, it is because he sees clearly the path that he must follow. The popular aim expresses his conviction, and he has no doubt of the fact. And if to-day Uncle Sam is an expansionist, it is for a still better reason. Imagination rules the world, and he knows it. As a ruler, Sam relies much on the wonder-working power of that "shaping faculty" with which he is highly gifted and endowed. As a wise man among the ignorant and superstitious, he makes use of signs and omens, of divination and of dreams. He goes not to the sibyl of Cumae, nor to the cave of Egeria, but to the source and spring of marvel in the human mind. He inquires the way of destiny, and reads his answer in the stars. To the fortune-telling peoples of the Orient he comes as the great western wizard with a full up-to-date equipment of scientific apparatus to dazzle and astonish them with marvels beyond even the Arabian Nights of their boyhood. To the East Indians he multiplies his "talking leaves." He lays his submarine cables, and stretches his overland telegraph wires through the heart of Asia and the Flowery Kingdom, to murmur in the ears of those credulous children whatever suggestions or ideas he wishes to inculcate, or spread abroad. Oh, Sam is a wide-awake dreamer, a seer, a visionary, an idealist of the first water. A dreamer and a schemer like him, with empire on the brain, an inventor who is always inventing and wants room, ample room and verge enough for exploiting his ideas, his trade, his inventions, is bound to expand.

Expansionist, indeed! and why not?—a full-blown expansionist (except in Boston and a few other localities), to-day, he could hardly be true to himself, his past or his future, otherwise. He is a politician—and a poet. He is a maker and a mover—of machinery

and ideas. He is a motor-power in the world to-day, and not a Keeley motor, either. He is a Babbage calculating machine. He lays down his premises, and by a series of deductive reasonings, clear and simple as a proposition in Euclid, without error or mistake, goes on to his far-traveled conclusion. A great mathematician, a superb inventor, a marvelous poet in his way, and why not expansionist? If men are not such, it is because they are not poets and inventors; not astronomers royal, and mathematicians. They must be very ordinary people with ordinary eyes in their heads, walking abroad and seeing nothing. Not so, Uncle Sam. He has the gift of fern seed, he walks invisible, seeing but unseen. His vision is not bounded by the horizon line of political conventions, by the make-shift and compromise of broken-down party hacks, their farrago of bosh and wretched expediencies. He makes use of these things and creatures, but goes far beyond them. He remembers his ancestry and his origin. Let us also remember it. He has a past behind him, as well as a future before him. In the past he speculated in land-values, in sugars and cotton, when cotton was king. To-day, he speculates in "futures"—and in the future of the country—because he believes in it. No discount on *that*, Uncle Sam! But returning now to the simple and elementary group of characters, the general principles and presuppositions involved in the underlying strata, which compose the character of Uncle Sam, and it is seen how a few primary instincts, prepotent ideas and affections, a few simple rules, have shaped his course and governed his action. Altogether one is struck, almost startled by seeing the observed fact, his bold individuality, his assertion of himself at all times and places wherever he has come in contact or in conflict with other races and peoples than his own. The stream of tendency in him of the Anglo-Saxon race is as marked and unmistakable as the course of the Gulf Stream in mid-ocean. Speaking generally, we may say for him and of him that he is what he is. He is nobody else but Uncle Sam. He is presumed to know what he is about, to know what he wants, his own intentions and how to compass them. He minds his own business. He follows his vocation, he rows with the wind and stream of destiny, progress generally, he follows Providence, and, as power is willing, he bends the oar and trims the sail to catch the prospering breeze, and he goes his way—where fortune smiles, and the fates beckon. He will arrive. His past warrants this belief and confidence in his future. But, as races culminate in individuals, we

shall find his type somewhere, in some strong character, some soaring and solitary peak of individuality, the primordial and primeval Uncle Sam. Where, and who is he? We left him, not long ago, at the Yule-tide feast, sitting there among the boors and Vikings, and we may recur to that again, but now for the typical Norseman, or north-country man, who to this age and generation best represents him? Different answers will be given, as different opinions prevail, but I will record my own. And I choose not the largest constructive intellect, Hamilton? Not the greatest achievement, Washington, Lincoln, or Grant, nor the all-round Franklin, not the vast understanding of Webster, even, but, for my purpose, a more simple and elemental character, a man quite apart as a distinct, solitary and unique personality. I choose the poet-statesman and publicist, William Cullen Bryant. Yes, Bryant of the aquiline nose and hoary beard that "streamed like a meteor in the troubled air," with the northern sagas in his heart and conscience and imagination, northern to the core of his being, cold as an iceberg, but with the old berserker rage at heart—witness his fearful denunciations of slavery—with the head of a Hebrew prophet, and not wanting the weird and wizard look into futurity, a Bard and a Viking of the latter age.

And so we return to the Yule-tide feast, and the legendary Uncle Sam sitting there at the head of the table, or near it, and equal to all the demands of the occasion. If he was there among the boors, the bards and the Vikings, then, at some time he must have embarked in one of their swift galleys to westward; perhaps, as the original of the "skeleton in armor;" more probably among those "twenty thousand Danish pirates who came over to England, and one fine morning founded the house of lords." For he had a restless and roving disposition; he had escapes and adventures, his dare-devildoms were many and proverbial. Yet it must be granted that his vices were allied to high virtues and heroic aims. He had the heroic strain in his blood—that strain of honor and of greatness that runs through Roman story, through English history, and through American enterprise. At some stage of his career, as late, probably, as the sixteenth or seventeenth century, these racial traits, which derived from his North-sea folk and kindred, were crossed in him by others of a different stock and a more or less tropic origin. The "land of the lingering snow" came down to the lands of the sun, and for a time reveled there. The long-slumbering seeds of loose desires and giant appetites,

the greed of gold, the lust of power and dominion, of "beauty and booty," burst suddenly into gorgeous and crimson bloom. It was a fatal cross, an awful transformation scene. But providential and necessary. The cold northern nature and sluggish vein of temperament required this transfusion of hot blood from the southron, this dash and sparkle of the land of chivalry and romance, the vein of Guzman and of Alfarouche, and even of the old filibuster, the buccaneers and pirates of the Spanish main.

But we must repudiate for Uncle Sam the long list of Spanish cruelties and atrocities which, in the seventeenth century, made a hell of the Netherlands under the Duke of Alva, and of Cuba and Porto Rico under their capatains-general, from the immediate successors of Columbus down to Weyler and Blanco.

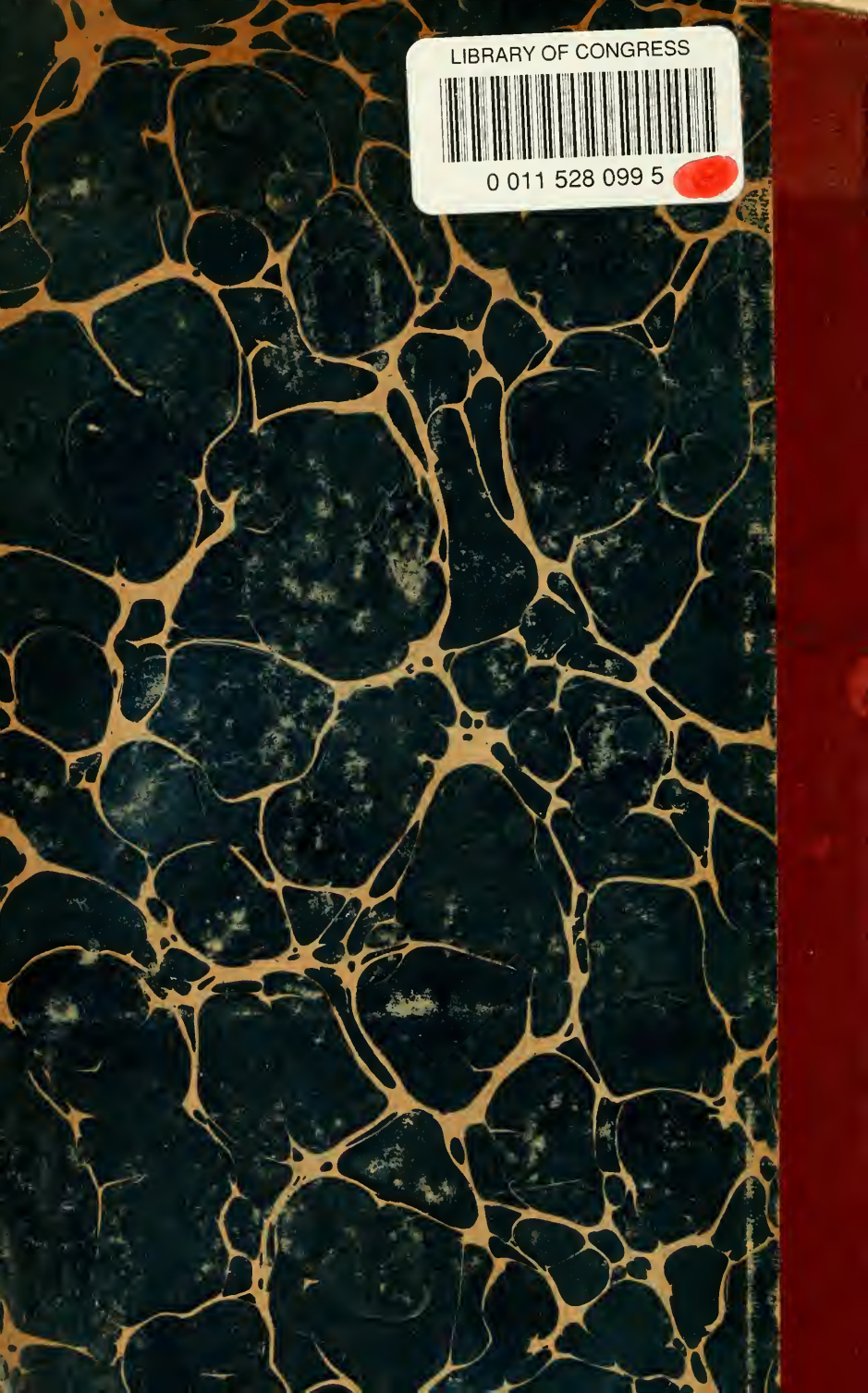
William of Orange might not be a perfect character, but he was a vast improvement over the Duke of Medina-Sidonia. Sir John Hawkins was a slave-trader, Ralegh and Essex were adventurers, but, at least, they never coined the blood of the poor Indians into gold, as Las Casas relates of their Spanish prototypes in the West Indies.

By what singular fatality has it come to pass that the very scene of these former cruelties became the theatre and the witness of the events of the Hispano-American war, and that with the disappearing fleets of Spain and her flag from this hemisphere, the long subject of population of these islands, and the people dwelling on the Porto-Rican shore broke into a carnival of joy at sight of the coming Stars and Stripes—"far off their coming shone"—and with shouts of "Vivan los Americanos!" hailed Uncle Sam as their deliverer from the devildoms of Spain! Blood will tell, they say, in the long run, and never has it told a plainer tale of the superior civilization of sweetness and light than in this crucial instance. And yet there are those who say that Uncle Sam had no right and no reason to expel the great Wild Boar who was ravaging these islands as ruthlessly as, at the period of the Norman conquest, the great Wild Boar of Britain was ravaging that island, when all its native living and breathing flesh was being mown by the sword, when its horizon was everywhere red with conflagration, when wood and wold were scorched and blackened by fire, and its green fields everywhere soaked in the blood of its hapless inhabitants. But Uncle Sam is not of that opinion. And he has only pity in his heart for those poor, mad, blind and wretched folk at home, so maimed of intellect, and so perverse in their

affections, as to rail at Uncle Sam for his interference in the matter, and even go so far as to pat upon the back the great beast of a Wild Boar, and tell him honestly to go about his business, while the new Ulysses—and Ulysses, you know, was a great hunter of wild boars—is met and greeted by them only with hootings and revilings on his return from the chase that was wholly successful, and wholly in the interest of humanity and civilization.

JOHN SAVARY,
Washington, D. C.

Cleveland Park.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